

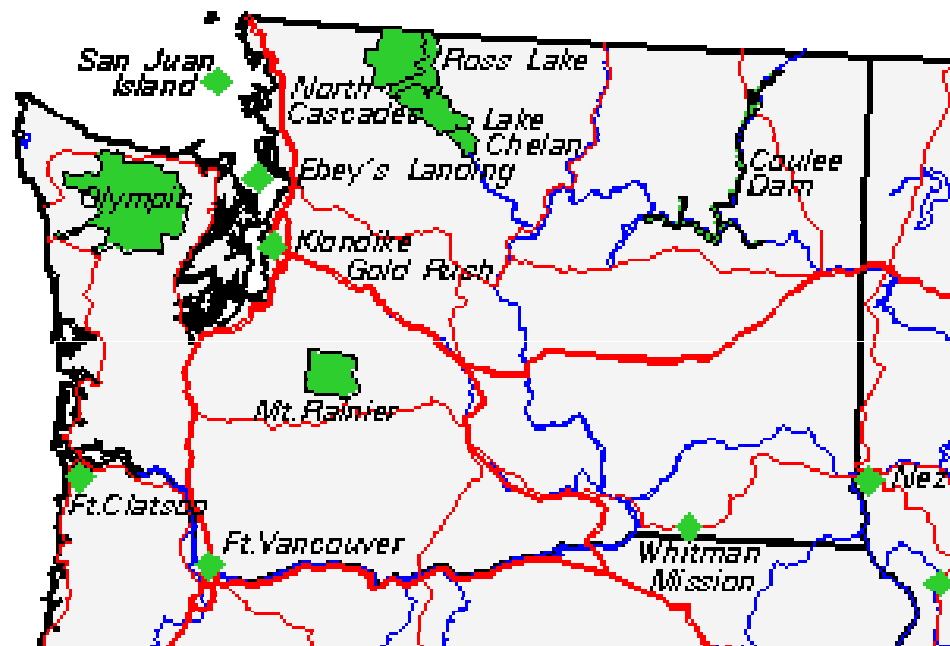
Report

Olympic National Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

Olympic National Park (NP) was formed in 1938 and encompasses three distinct ecosystems that comprise glacier-capped mountains, old growth and temperate rain forest, and Pacific coastline. The NP is located on the Olympic Peninsula in northwestern Washington State (see Figure 1). It is about 40 miles west of the Seattle-Tacoma corridor, and immediately west of Puget Sound.

Figure 1. Location of Olympic National Park



The NP occupies over 922,000 acres within the central portion of Olympic Peninsula, including a narrow 63-mile strip of land along the peninsula's Pacific Coast. About 95 percent of this land is managed as wilderness. There is a complex network of state and federal management agencies, Native American tribes, and private landowners on the peninsula. For example, the United States Forest Service (USFS) manages most of the land immediately adjacent to the NP; the USFS land comprises over 650,000 acres including five wilderness areas. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) maintains jurisdiction over a 250-foot-wide right-of-way (ROW) corridor for U.S. 101 through most areas of the NP. Twelve Indian tribes have traditional association with NP

land; this group includes six self-governance tribes that can enter into compacts with the Interior Department. The NP is also designated as an International Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site, although these designations do not include any management authority.

The most recent management plan for the NP identified six management objectives:

- Resource stewardship and protection;
- Access and enjoyment;
- Education and interpretation;
- Proactive leadership;
- Science and research; and
- Professionalism.

To carry out these objectives, the plan included recommendations to encourage and promote visitor accommodations on the park periphery. The plan also recommended further studies of transportation alternatives for the U.S. 101 corridors through the Lake Crescent and Kalaloch areas of the NP.

Over the past few years, the NP has averaged about 4.6 million annual visits. As with most other parks, the highest visitation times are during the summer months. However, Olympic NP has seen an increase in shoulder season visits in recent years; in 1998, the peak six visitation months (May to October) accounted for about 75 percent of annual visits. Throughout the year, the NP is the top attraction on the Peninsula. Hence, the NP could be characterized as a “destination” park, with most visitors having the NP visit as the primary reason for a given trip to the area.

The NP receives a significant number of overnight visits, including about 125,000 visitor nights annually in the backcountry. There is no predominant length of stay at the NP; however, most visits tend to be from one-half to three days in length. Visits tend to be longer on summer weekends. About three-fourths of park visitors are from western Washington State, with about one-half of total visitation from the Puget Sound area. Given this strong usage by nearby residents, day-to-day visitation patterns tend to be strongly influenced by weather predictions for the Puget Sound area.

Main park activities include sightseeing, camping, hiking and picnicking. Principal activities in the wilderness areas include day hiking, backpacking, camping, fishing, and mountain climbing. The area around Lake Crescent on the north side of the NP accounts for about one-half of total park visitation. The other major areas are Hurricane Ridge and Kalaloch.

There are 14 developed areas dispersed throughout the NP. U.S. 101 loops around the west, north and east boundaries of the NP, with the developed areas accessed via radial roads from U.S. 101 (see Figure 2). These radial roads are comprised of paved and gravel surfaces, with the radial roads terminating at trailheads; no roads pass completely through the park. The main administrative facilities for the NP are in Port Angeles. Visitor Centers are operated in three locations; the Port Angeles location is open and staffed

year-round, while the Hurricane Ridge and Hoh Rain Forest locations are self-service during winter months. The Port Angeles location typically logs about one-half of total Visitor Center usage in the NP. Additional interpretive exhibits are available at four other ranger stations in the park.

Figure 2. Surface Transportation System near Olympic National Park



The NP operates 16 campgrounds with a total of 910 sites. An additional 1,200 camping sites and 23 three-sided shelters are available in the backcountry. The developed areas contain 230 picnic sites, and there are over 610 miles of hiking trails in the front country and wilderness areas. A concessionaire operates four lodging facilities within the park; two of these facilities are open year-round, while the other two facilities are open for the summer and shoulder seasons. Concession-operated grocery and camper supply stores are available at four locations in the park. Additional food and supplies are widely available in towns and cities around the park. A snow skiing area is also located at the Hurricane Ridge area. The concessionaire and park-operated facilities vary widely in terms of winter closure.

Olympic NP participates in the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program. Under this program, user fees are charged for a variety of items including vehicle entry, parking at select locations, RV dump station usage, campgrounds, and backcountry permits. A variety of multi-use and annual passes are available for most fee items.

■ 2.0 Existing Transportation Services

As previously mentioned, U.S. 101 provides the primary access route to and around the NP. For most of its length through the NP, U.S. 101 is a relatively narrow and winding roadway with a mix of recreational, commute, through, and truck traffic. Recreational traffic is projected to account for between 40 percent and 80 percent of traffic on the roadway. While the roadway is shared with bicyclists, physical features of the roadway act to discourage all but the most experienced riders.

The Washington State ferry system operates car and passenger ferry service throughout most of the year between Victoria, British Columbia and Port Angeles. A summer passenger-only ferry also operates between Port Angeles and Victoria. Several other communities on the Olympic Peninsula such as Bremerton, Bainbridge and Port Townsend receive varying levels of passenger and ferry service from the Seattle-Tacoma area. A 1991 survey indicated that the top five ferry routes serving the Peninsula had over 91,000 annual recreation vehicle-trips out of a total of 6.7 million annual vehicle-trips. These five routes averaged 107 daily round-trips in 1999. All of the passenger ferry routes have time coordinated connections with local transit services on the Olympic Peninsula.

Four transit authorities provide service on the Peninsula. One of the four, Clallam Transit System, provides local service between Port Angeles and Forks along the northern boundary of the NP. The service, which passes through the Lake Crescent area, has seven round-trips per day in summer, nine in winter, and four on Saturdays throughout the year. All buses on this run include a bicycle rack that can hold up to two bicycles at a time.

Scheduled air service is provided to Port Angeles from Seattle-Tacoma (Sea-Tac) and Victoria, British Columbia. Daily intercity bus service is also provided to Port Angeles from downtown Seattle and Sea-Tac. Rental cars are available in three communities near the NP.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Visitors to Olympic NP can currently choose from a variety of travel modes to access the park. As with most National Parks, visitors that have a private automobile have the most direct access to the dispersed recreation opportunities around Olympic NP. Nonetheless, park visitors, particularly those from Puget Sound and Olympic Peninsula communities, have a number of alternative travel options including bicycle, ferry, and bus transit to the more popular areas of the NP.

Based on recent planning activities undertaken by the NP and its regional planning partners, the largest-scale Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) need at this time is a 15-mile multi-purpose trail along the north side of Lake Crescent.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

Olympic NP management and staff have either led or participated in several special or continuous transportation planning efforts for the areas surrounding the NP. These planning efforts provide management and staff with a fairly comprehensive picture of transportation needs, with a greater emphasis on the road system. The plans also provide management and staff with a multi-year program of prioritized needs that are awaiting funding availability.

A 1985 road system evaluation identified a 10-year program of major maintenance and road upgrade projects. The plan included a comprehensive evaluation of existing road conditions and suggested a functional classification for all park roads. The plan aimed to promote a safe, leisurely and unhurried experience by addressing critical deficiencies in terms of safety and maintenance.

A master plan for the U.S. 101 corridor was completed in 1997 for the area within the highway ROW that is controlled by WSDOT. Since the plan was limited to area within the ROW, no suggestions were made for broader alternative transportation facilities or services. This master plan identified strategies to:

- Enhance safety, mobility, multimodal access, and access to interpretive areas through small-scale physical improvements (e.g., shoulder widening, access control, passing lanes, etc.);
- Improve roadside interpretive and guide material for traveler information; and
- Strengthen ROW stewardship to improve roadside vegetation management.

The Lake Crescent Alternatives Analysis, which was also completed in 1997, analyzed nine options for enhancing non-motorized travel around the Lake Crescent area. The recommended long-term option involved a series of five improvements to develop an eight-foot-wide aggregate surface trail on existing alignments north of the lake. Cost estimates for this 15-mile multi-purpose trail ranged between \$3 million and \$9 million based on the final selected alignment.

In developing a regional transportation plan, WSDOT in collaboration with the Peninsula Region Transportation Planning Organization (PRTPO), the state-designated planning agency for the area, developed a set of level of service (LOS) measures for rural transit routes, commuter-regional routes, and high-capacity transit routes that service the ferry system. These standards included one trip per day for rural routes, five trips per day for commuter-regional routes, and meeting every ferry for high-capacity routes.

PRTPO also endorsed an LOS measure developed by Washington State Ferries for the ferry system. For the Peninsula routes, the LOS measure is based on equalizing ferry crossing time with the time it would take to drive to one's destination. The equalization is determined through the number of "boat waits" one must encounter before boarding a ferry. The ferry LOS varies according to route, season, and time of week.

Using these non-auto LOS measures, the regional planning partners found that ferry and transit services, in both the existing condition and near-term planning horizon, met these LOS thresholds.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Master Plan; Olympic National Park; October 1996

Statement for Management; Olympic National Park; 1996.

Interpretive Prospectus; Olympic National Park; June 1977.

Interpretive Prospectus – The Coastal Strip; Olympic National Park; June 1985.

Regional Transportation Plan; Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization; June 1995.

Regional Transportation Plan – Tourism Element; Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization; October 1999.

Regional Transportation Plan Summary; Newsletter; Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization; June 1995.

Road System Evaluation; Olympic National Park; December 1985.

The Washington Coastal Corridor – U.S. 101 Corridor Master Plan – Summary; Washington State Department of Transportation; March 1997.

Lake Crescent Alternatives Analysis – Final Report; Washington State Department of Transportation; November 1997.

Olympic National Park Home Page; National Park Service; <http://www.nps.gov/olym/>

Official Map and Guide; Olympic National Park; 1996

Kalaloch Development Concept Plan; Olympic National Park; September 1988.

Ozette Development Concept Plan; Olympic National Park; September 1988.

Quinault Development Concept Plan; Olympic National Park; September 1988.

Soleduck Development Concept Plan; Olympic National Park; September 1988.